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The Government of the Heart.

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S E R M O N

Preached before the

UNIVERSITY of OXFORD,

At St. PETER'S,

On Sunday, February 26. 1758.

By FRANCIS WEBBER, D.D.

Dean of Hereford

And Rector of Exeter College.

Published at the Request of Mr. VICE-CHAN-
CELLOR, and the HEADS of HOUSES.

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PROV. IV. 23.

*Keep thy Heart with all Diligence; for
out of it are the Issues of Life.*

THE Heart of man is generally regarded as the seat of his affections. To *keep the heart* therefore *with all diligence*, is to have a constant guard upon the affections; since from them proceed the issues of life; that is, the conduct of life, its happiness, its wisdom, and consequently the events of life, in the main, depend upon the affections of the Heart.

The writings of *Solomon* are full of sententious maxims, as well as most useful precepts for the regulation of human life, and as such have they been ever esteemed a most valuable treasure, even tho' no superior Hand were sup-

posed to have guided his pen. His enlarged understanding, his thorough experience of the world, and *giving his heart*, as he expresses it, *to know madness and folly as well as wisdom*, that is, his practising the bad part of life as well as the good, had sufficiently qualified him to distinguish between the one and the other, to judge properly of each, and to make such observations upon both, as should be of use and benefit to mankind.

And yet, from this experience and wisdom of his, he has drawn conclusions, which at first view may seem inconsistent with each other. For one while he tells us, that *all is vanity and vexation of spirit*;—that *there is nothing new under the sun*;—that *all things come alike to all*;—*one event to the righteous and to the wicked*;—that *in much wisdom is much sorrow*, and *he that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow*, and the like.—Whilst at other times, from the same experience, he informs us of a difference betwixt the righteous and the wicked, as to events in life, in the order of Providence: that *the upright shall dwell in the land*;—that *length of days and long life and peace shall be added to them*;—that *he that honour-eth the Lord shall have his barns filled with plenty, and his presses burst out with new wine*;—that *the curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked, but blessings*

blessings upon the habitation of the just. — To cite every passage to this purpose, would be to transcribe the whole book of the *Proverbs*. — Let us rather consider, how these different accounts of things are reconcileable with each other.

Solomon was not a superficial or hasty observer : his sagacity and great abilities, natural and supernatural, as is just now observed, had furnished him with a most extensive knowledge and comprehensive view of things, and the various and contradictory scenes of life he had gone through had confirmed his theory experimentally. He had addicted himself not only to the study of wisdom, but to the practice of folly. He had indulged his passions and given a loose to his appetites, without reserve. *All things, says he, have I seen in the days of my vanity.* — At the same time, being blessed with a wife and understanding heart, he could not be at a loss, in his serious hours, to form just observations both upon the ways of men, and upon the ways of Providence in the government of them.

As this wise Prince could not but acknowledge, what has been the observation of all ages, that, in the ordinary distribution of things, *there is one event to all ;—that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor*
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favour to men of skill, but time and chance happeneth to them all ;—that there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that longeth his life in his wickedness : —

So neither could so discerning a person avoid seeing, that, notwithstanding this promiscuous distribution of things in general, yet there was certainly some particular Superintendence presiding over the affairs of mankind, which frequently distinguished the good from the bad, by evident marks of Divine favour and disfavour in this life. From which discernment, he has made a collection of most excellent rules and precepts for every relation of life, domestick, civil, and religious, not founded on speculation, but on fact and experience : maxims full of encouragement to the one, and terror to the other ; placing the expectations of happiness and prosperity on the side of integrity and religion ; which, tho' not certainly to be depended upon in every individuals particular case, yet, certainly pointing out to him the safest path to walk in, in order to entitle himself to the blessings of Heaven, and to give him the best grounds of hope for success in all his undertakings.—In a general view of things, a general Providence cannot be supposed to make, much less to promise that visible marks of distinction shall be made betwixt the good and bad

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in this world, where, in the present constitution, the connexion and mutual dependency of things must frequently involve both in a common calamity, and where even the merit of virtue would be destroyed by such a constant distinction, were it to be made. But yet *Solomon* had experience enough, and authority enough to say, that *tho' a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his days be prolonged*, without determining any farther upon this mans case, yet *surely he knew* (he says) *it should be well with them that fear God*. They might expect, and had the greatest reason to hope it should *be well with them* in this life; that they who sat out and proceeded on such a principle as the *fear of God*, had at least the best pretensions to promise themselves happiness and success in this world; but that in the next, most infallibly, it should *be well with them*, however they might be disappointed here. — Wise therefore would it be in all men, to make the same conclusion upon the matter, which is made at the end of this book, that *to fear God and keep his commandments is the whole of man*, the whole of his duty here, and the whole of his expectations both here, and hereafter, when *God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil*.

Thus

Thus then you see the different kind of conclusions, which *Solomon* appears to have made. In the character of the Sensualist and the man of this world only, who has no farther views than *to eat and to drink and to be merry*, he pronounces *all to be vanity and vexation of spirit*. And how should it be otherwise? Place ourselves in the same situation, and things will have the same appearance; a general fatality, or chance, or accident, or whatever you please to call it, attending all mankind; a mechanical kind of rotation of events, without design, direction, or superintendence; all fare alike the good and the bad, we rise and fall promiscuously, flourish and decay fortuitously, without distinction. — Such a representation of things as this seems to be one chief design of the book of *Ecclesiastes*, being for the most part descriptive of the principles and reasonings of the libertin and free-thinker of those days.

But attend to the Preacher in the character of a Religionist, speaking in the spirit of wisdom and discernment, and another more chearful scene of things opens itself to our view, to wit, a particular Providence superintending the affairs of mankind, a constitution so ordered and settled, that the advantages of life are evidently
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on the side of the religious and good, and tho' a visible distinction in their favour cannot always be made under a general Providence, yet that the wisdom of the Almighty has so contrived this stupendous system, that his care of particulars in the moral world is interwoven into the general plan, which he has established in the natural. — We see enough of this plan to convince us, that it is founded upon truth and rectitude, and tho' events do not regularly correspond with the weak notions and fond expectations of men, who see but little into this complicated scheme, yet that the interests of virtue are even amply provided for in this life, and that upon the whole it must appear, that *the righteous, and the wise, and their works are*, in an emphatical sense, *in the hand of God*.

But it is not my design to enter into so nice a subject, as that of a general and a particular Providence. The words of my text have led me into these few remarks upon the sentiments of their author. — Let us now confine ourselves to the text itself more immediately. *Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life*. — The words themselves are too plain and intelligible to need any explanation. I have there-

therefore only to illustrate the precept they contain, by such observations as shall naturally arise.

Since then the Heart and its affections are of so great importance, that the issues of life depend upon them; the obvious question to be asked is, how the heart is to be kept, what means are to be used to guard it in such a manner, as that the events of life shall answer the end of it, for the happiness and praise and honour of its owner?

But perhaps, Man is not master enough of himself and his own conduct, as to be capable of following this prescription of the wise man. For if he be a *necessary* agent, it will be in vain for him to put this question to himself at all, how his heart is to be kept; since his actions will still go on without choice or direction of his own, or a power of governing himself by one motive in preference to another. So far such an enquiry would be useless. — But then, on the other hand, if he really feels himself at liberty to act this way or that, and that he has in his own hands a power of acting for himself, and of choosing means for such an end, as a *free* agent; will it not be equally vain and ridiculous to attempt arguing him into a fatality of action, by telling him he is not free, whilst he is conscious

scious to himself that he is? For after all, whatever becomes of those intricate disputes concerning "freewill, fixt fate, foreknowledge absolute," which can serve only to perplex and puzzle his understanding; yet it seems, the man still finds himself in fact at his own disposal, and consequently accountable for his own actions. No abstract speculations or sceptical sophistries, however ingenious, can possibly defraud him of that liberty, which he feels himself in actual possession of.

Finding himself then free, his next enquiry will be what kind of freedom it is he enjoys; whether it be absolute and unembarrassed, or whether he is liable to such influences, as may be more likely to lead him one way than another, into a wrong course of life rather than a right, or the reverse.—The way to know this, is only to reflect on the state of human nature, as it is at present. Now the present state of human nature is universally felt, and universally acknowledged to be a state of degeneracy, a disordered state, wherein the byass of the affections are turned the wrong way, the ballance of the human constitution so unequally poised, that the inclinations of mankind in general tend to the gratification of the sensual part, rather than the intellectual or spiritual. We do not here en-

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quire, how this disjointment of the human frame has been brought about ; 'tis sufficient to observe that so it is in fact, and that tho' *God had made man upright* in the beginning, yet *they have sought out many inventions* since, by which that uprightness no longer subsists.

From this view of man, it will be necessary to acknowledge that his Freedom is not of that absolute kind, as to be attended with no difficulties in the exertion of it. Since, if the motives and applications to the gratifying the sensual part are more in number, or more immediately present and striking than those of the other kind, and consequently the affections by this means rendered more flexible and yielding on one side than the other, it must of course be allowed that his better part, that is, his rational or spiritual nature, must lie under a manifest disadvantage, being so far restrained in its freedom, in proportion as the opposite principle, his sensual passions, have gained the ascendant in his constitution. All this ~~may~~ must be allowed to be a restraint upon his freedom of action ; but a restraint not forcible or compulsive, for it may be resisted and overcome, but a restraint of that moral kind, which makes it probable, even more than probable, according to his present character, that he will generally submit to the sollicitations of his senses,

senses, rather than attend to the suggestions of his reason. — In this overballance of the sensual affections consists, if I mistake not, the imperfection of our present state, and the lapsed condition of mankind.

One cannot avoid taking notice in this place of the unfair representation, which is often made of mankind upon this subject, particularly by a late writer, in his *Enquiry into the nature and origin of evil*; where, after laying down some excellent principles upon the introduction of evil in general, yet the use he makes of them in his deductions is by no means warranted from his premisses. For, whereas in the one he goes upon the supposition of the Deity's *sufferance* of evil, as expedient for the sake of the greatest good upon the whole, which is undoubtedly true, in the other he improves this *sufferance* into a *necessity* of moral evil, as inherent in the original frame of man: a necessity so strong and powerful, as to defeat the efficacy of every remedy, which the wisdom of God or man can provide against it; whether from education, government, religion, or even revelation itself. — Civil government for instance, upon his plan, consists of subjects, the bulk of whom, being naturally wicked, must therefore be governed in their own

way, that is, by governors as wicked as themselves. — Religion, by the unavoidable depravity of mankind, must needs be filled with superstition, cruelty, treachery, nonsense, bigotry of the worst kind, and so introduce a greater train of evils than it was intended to prevent. — Divine Revelation, if such a thing can ever be supposed, cannot possibly answer any end, it must be corrupted as soon as given, both in principle and practice, and be replete with a new set of mischiefs, which the world would otherwise have escaped. In short, Deity itself cannot give a Revelation, consistently with the present state of mankind, because it would be giving them a rule to act by, in direct opposition to that unalterable nature, by which they must necessarily be governed. — This seems to be the substance in few words of the author's conclusions; the rest being little more than declamation and flourish, in the usual stile of infidelity. And a most melancholy picture indeed it is he has given us of ourselves; but then the drawing is taken from a point of view, which presents only the dark side of human nature, and which the painter has made still darker, by representing it under the shade of a fatal necessity of going wrong. Whereas the proper light to view the object in, should have been from a situation to have

have exhibited the bright part of it, as well as the gloom ; and it would have been seen, that there is likewise a good principle belonging to us, attempting to lead us into good ; were it not, that the prevailing influence of its antagonist, unless we apply ourselves to the remedies and assistances, which Providence has put into our hands, will be more likely to mislead us, than conduct us right. — Let us consider what these remedies are, and their efficacy. They are, as has been already hinted, such as arise from education, government, religion. But all these remedies must take deep root in the heart : the *heart* must be *kept with all diligence*.

By education is generally understood, not only the institution of youth for a particular profession, but for the conduct of life in general. It is designed not only to make them skilfull in a calling, but good out of it ; to regulate their passions, to correct their errors, to obviate the influence of bad examples, to habituate them to order, discipline, government of themselves and subjection to others ; to give them in short such principles, as may form a character in them for publick utility, as well as the more immediate interest and advantage of themselves. But unless these early documents are laid up in the *heart*, and *kept there with all diligence, the issues of life* will

will be but little the better for them : the stream will soon run muddy, when once the fountain has suffered itself to be defiled.

Civil government, another aid to correct the depravity of mankind, regards indeed chiefly the outward action, as it cannot take cognisance of the heart. But still the outward action, by habit and practice, has such an influence upon the inner man, that it will often bring him, insensibly as it were, to think right, as well as to act right. It creates an interest within him, which may lead him to do that from principle, which he finds he is otherwise obliged to do by force. But this interest, I say, must be made within, that is, in the heart ; for unless that be engaged, it will still be but outward action, and will have no merit to plead either before God or man.

The great corrective therefore of our lapsed condition must be Religion, after all ; a principle of religion, fixed and rooted, not in the head, but in the heart. For, what can education do more, than to mould the tender frame, whilst its limbs are yet pliable, into a shape susceptible of good impressions ? to give it such kind prejudices in favour of virtue, as shall make the road to it less difficult, and more practicable ? to accustom the youth, by restraint, instruction and authority, to good habits, before the enticements
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of the world have gotten possession of him? — But then, if there be nothing more binding at the bottom, nothing of conscience, religion, and the fear of God and an hereafter, to take hold of his affections, all other fences are soon broken down, the man is become his own master, and, being a man of spirit, he enters at once into the pleasures and luxuries, the vices, and vanities, and madness of the world, just as he is invited. And what should restrain him? The outworks are destroyed, nothing within is fortified, and the Heart, which should have held out, has already betrayed him into the enemies hands. — Civil government can do but little to reclaim him, it can only be a check upon his outward actions, but cannot reach to the recesses of the heart and its affections: the utmost it can pretend to do, is to make, perhaps, obedient subjects of bad men. — But *when the law of God is in his heart, and kept there with all diligence*, it is a security for his outward behaviour, as well as a certain assurance to himself, that *his footsteps shall not slide. The foundation of his house is laid on a rock, and whatever storms or floods shall beat upon it, it shall not be shaken, for it is founded upon a rock.*

Indeed

Indeed, if the preserving of the heart be of such consequence, it cannot be of less consequence to have it stored with such furniture, as may make it worth preserving. The materials for this must be laid in first by the skilful hand of education, and then formed and fashioned by the maturer reason of the man himself, from that natural understanding, which the God of nature has implanted in him. Much then depends upon early instruction and the principles instilled, but much more upon the culture of those principles, when riper years have enabled him to judge of their intrinsic goodness and value. No nation under heaven has ever despised the benefits of education, but the good effects of it have been defeated, not only by the general depravity of mankind, but by the imperfection, and even depravity of the principles themselves, in which they have been educated. In countries ignorant and barbarous, what can be learnt but ignorance and barbarism? In the more enlightened regions of science and liberal arts, whilst the man is humanized and rendered tractable, social and ingenious, yet if the religion, he has been brought up in, is blended with notions unworthy of the Deity, authorizing absurd and impious practices, the effects of such a religion must be pernicious,

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in proportion as the heart is attached to the corrupt doctrines it is mixed with. For *out of the evil treasure of the heart must needs proceed evil things*, as well as from *its good treasure, good things*.

If the Almighty has ever revealed his Will to mankind, for their better instruction and amendment, it might be expected that they, who have enjoyed the benefit of such revelation, should be the better for it, both in knowledge and practice. And yet it is made a problem, whether or no, in some christian churches, the enormous corruptions of Christianity have not made even the Gospel an occasion of more hurt than good. This is a point I shall not take upon me to determine. But another point is very clear, that the Gospel itself was designed to do infinite good, its doctrines, duties, and precepts all tending to produce happiness in this life, as well as an happy eternity hereafter. It is suited to the reasonable nature of man, calculated to convince his understanding, to influence his affections, and direct his actions. And this, without *altering* his nature, as the before-mentioned author would make necessary, but by setting before him such motives, inducements, and obligations to a virtuous conduct, as might be a

counter-poise to those sensual temptations, which are daily leading him into evil : not altering his nature by restraining his freedom, but enlarging his freedom by opening his views, giving his rational powers a fairer scope to exert themselves, bringing the object of his supreme good nearer home to him, placing it in a clearer and more striking light than it had been seen in before, putting him in a capacity of making a juster estimate betwixt his interests in this world and the next, and thus enabling and encouraging him to rectifie the ballance of his affections, and to mend his constitution, by paying that attention to the better part of it, which properly belongs to it. Nor can this be said to be altering his nature, any more than the invention and use of optic glasses can be said to alter the nature, or form of the eye.

In those christian churches, where the Gospel is professed and taught in greater purity, let those, who have had the advantages of being educated in them, remember, that if they have neglected those advantages, they have the more to answer for before God, at the great day of account. *Where more is given, more will be required.* If men are not the better for being better taught,

taught, the failure must lie at their own door; *the heart has not been kept with all diligence.* For,

Let us now suppose a man to be furnished with the best principles of knowledge, which a good education, an improved understanding, and the additional assistance of revelation can give him; and enquire how it comes to pass, that these causes have so little effect upon his life and actions. We shall find it to be wholly owing to the neglecting the heart. — In some men, I am afraid I may say in most, the heart is so far from being *kept with all diligence*, that it has not been kept at all: it is left to itself: it is not so much as affected with those principles, which ought to govern it: it stands detached, as it were, from all engagements with them, and has nothing to do, but to perform the office of that cool monitor, the *video meliora — deteriora sequor*.

The head may be stored with all kinds of knowledge, and have gone to the depths of human learning; may have made its researches into the works and wonders of the creation, and be able to speak of the beauties and varieties of nature, *from the cedar that is in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall*; and yet the heart shall remain unenriched with these bounties of Providence, if it be content with see-

ing them only, without feeling the beneficent hand of the Divine Author. It may happen, that a mans reason may be honest enough to itself, and friendly enough to truth, to search for it with candor, and to profess it generously; but if the fruit of his enquiries be not laid up in the heart, and there nourished within its proper soil, it will be but the *seed sown on stony ground, which, not having root in itself, endureth for a while, and then withereth away.* It is possible, he may have fully satisfied himself in the most interesting points of religion, have examined its evidences, and be under the strongest persuasion of its importance; he may be master of great abilities, even to obviate every cavil of the gainsayer, and to confute the unbeliever; yet, if he has not impressed his heart warmly with the sentiment of religion, as well as the conviction of its truth, however serviceable his learned labours may be to others, they will be but unprofitable servants to himself. For *'tis with the heart only man believeth unto righteousness.*

Let not any one say, this is decrying human learning, or undervaluing its use. The observations I have been making are built on the contrary supposition, *viz.* the importance and necessity of it, for supplying the mind with such

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materials, as may lay the firmer and surer foundation for the heart to raise its superstructure. — But these materials are to be had only from the Scriptures, say some. The Scriptures are our best instructors, no doubt. But other instructions are necessary to understand the Scriptures themselves: and a wise *scribe will instruct himself unto the kingdom of heaven, like a wise householder, who is able to bring forth out of his treasure things new and old.* All parts of learning may be made subservient to religion, and the most valuable branches of it particularly so to revelation, to explain and illustrate the scriptures. But I dwell not upon this point, which is too plain to be misunderstood, especially in this place.

Let me proceed rather to note some other deficiencies, wherein the heart is concerned. — What has been already said suggests to us a very common and a very considerable one, and that is, the want of good instructions and sound learning, to fortify the heart against the attacks of enthusiasm. — Religion is a serious thing, and when it meets with gloomy or injudicious minds, even in good men, it is sometimes apt to carry them too far, to make them *over-righteous and to destroy themselves.* It frequently leads us into high conceits of our spiritual condition,
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as particular favourites of Heaven, as distinguished with supernatural illuminations, and extraordinary attainments beyond others. And 'tis well if it ends here, if it does not make us censorious, uncharitable, and accusers of our brethren. — But what shall we say for the poor illiterate, uninstructed sinner? When he once comes to be serious, tired perhaps with his sins, and loaded with their guilt, what wonder if he fall an easy prey to every wild enthusiasm and spirit of delusion? *Whilst the arrows of the Almighty are within him, the poison whereof drinketh up his spirit*, his desponding heart is glad to catch at any relief that shall come in his way: he lies at the mercy of the first empirick that offers, and is either plunged by him into the gulph of despair, or elevated into a visionary confidence, at the expence of common sense, and oftentimes of common honesty. This drives him into all the phrenzy of religion and fanatick extravagance, whilst a rational gospel-instruction would have taught him, that the genuine marks of the blessed Spirit do not shew themselves in extacies, and raptures, and frightful fits of devotion, but are seen, by the effects they produce, in a constant, regular, and steady course of piety. *The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.*

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Superstition, near of kin to enthusiasm, seduces the heart to substitute shadows for realities. How many men are there, who pretend to compound for their vices, by a strict observance of rituals and formalities? They seem to make their court to the Deity, as to a ceremonious prince, (pardon the comparison) who will be ready to overlook their omissions in *the weightier matters of the Law*, provided they neglect no point of ceremony due to himself, and are but punctual in keeping up the pomp and parade of religion, whatever becomes of the spirit and power of it. This, in our Blessed Saviours account, is the precise character of the hypocrite.

But not every kind of superstition is to be called by the odious name of hypocrisy. That which we have more immediately in view at present is of a more innocent nature, and proceeds not so much from the wickedness of the heart, as the weakness of the head. Many a good man cannot satisfy himself of his own goodness: he is still wanting to himself, he thinks, and cannot do enough to render himself acceptable to a Being of infinite purity. And thus is he made miserable, even in the midst of *Comforts, which should refresh his Soul*. He places his *affections on things above* to a degree that is inconsistent with his
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happinefs here below ; as if this world was a ftate of punifhment only, inftead of trial and probation of his virtues for a better. This makes him fly to the melancholy expedient of excluding himfelf from the world : a world not deferving his notice ; its interefts and purfuits fo much beneath him, that he fcarce thinks it worth reforming. — But the providence of God has thought otherwife. He has placed him in a ftate, where he is to exercife focial offices as well as religious. Indeed the one is as much his duty as the other ; *theſe ought to be done, and the other not left undone.*

This kind of ſuperftition ariſes from a certain narrownefs of the mind, which is not large enough to comprehend the idea of connexion in the ſyſtem of religion, but is apt to make comparisons between its ſeveral duties, over-rating one at the expence of another, and hoping to compenſate its deficiencies in one part, by a more ſcrupulous attention to ſome other. But we are told by an Apoſtle, that *whoſoever ſhall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all* : not guilty of breaking the whole law, but guilty of breaking the chain by which the whole is connected together, and of offending that authority, by which the whole is eſtabliſhed. — It is remarked of one of the kings of *Ju-
dah,*

dab, that he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, but not with a perfect heart: that is, he kept to his duty in many & essential points, and performed it punctually, but he took the liberty to dispense with himself in others, which, tho' equally enjoined, he had perswaded himself were not of equal importance, whether they were observed or no. — Thus, when the several branches of duty are set in competition with each other, in point of excellence and dignity, no wonder if the moral part is often sacrificed, for the sake of sublimer attainments in the spiritual; and on the other hand, it is the same superstition, which often leads men to neglect and even to despise Spirituals, out of a higher regard to the law of Morality. For if morals and spirituals are to be put in rivalry together, it must needs be, that one or the other will suffer in the contest. — Now, if even the best of men are so liable, from a partial estimate of their duty, to swerve from the rule of duty itself, how necessary is the admonition of the wise man in the text, to *keep the heart with all diligence, since out of it are the issues of life*; the issues of life, as to the uniformity of obedience, from whence results the completion of its happiness?

But the great deficiency of the heart is still in itself. The character given of the heart in Scripture is, that it *is deceitful above all things*: and if scripture had not told us so, our own experience would. The heart imposes upon us, if it be not more proper to say, we impose upon the heart, by making it believe we are doing right, whilst we are doing wrong. Indeed so many and various are the impositions from it and upon it, that *Solomon* says, *he that trusteth in his own heart is a fool*.

Men set out with good principles and good intentions, but the strength of temptation, the contagion of example, and the want of resolution defeat all their good designs. — The evil passions are so strong in some, that, it seems, they cannot resist temptations; they find it so difficult to controul their passions, that they care not to attempt controlling them at all. They persuade themselves, it is a thing impracticable, till at last it becomes really impracticable. And here again, the medicinal doctrine of fatality in human actions, which has been so much in fashion of late years, comes in to their relief, as it teaches them, that their constitution is already fixt and settled by nature, that they cannot avoid following its tendencies and obeying its motions,
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and it is in vain to strive against nature. Such a flattering doctrine as this must needs make an easy passage into the heart, and then the man becomes wicked upon principle.

Others, whose passions are not so strong, are yet seduced by the contagion of example; and tho' so well intentioned, as not to run into criminal excesses, yet are so sociable and complaisant to the world, that they will run the risque of following the multitude, rather than attempt the invidious task of being singularly good. They reason with themselves, that as Providence has placed them in a mixt state betwixt the good and bad, they cannot be wholly disengaged from either, and if they do not side entirely with the latter, they are innocent enough at least, and may deserve to be ranked amongst the former.—But this is a deception of the heart, which weakens its sincerity extremely, as it induces a coolness and indifference in its affections, which will destroy the merit of the best actions.

Want of resolution in most, is the great source of the heart's imbecillity. No heroick virtue was ever attained without a firmness of mind, to make men consistent with their principles, in pursuing their good and great designs, and carrying them into execution. Diffidence in them-

selves, or too much confidence in others, will relax their fortitude, and lead them the contrary way into sin and error ; and when they once find themselves entangled in the labyrinths of vice, the next step they are necessitated to take, is to invent glosses and comments upon their actions, in order to justify them, not only to others, but to themselves, and, if possible, to quiet the reproaches of their own conscience. And it is remarkable, so weak is the human mind, that, by habituating itself to this kind of sophistry, it becomes its own dupe ; it can sometimes reason itself into a favourable opinion of what has been done, however wicked or detestable, and at last becomes thoroughly satisfied, that all is well, that truth and reason are fully of its side, and that it has acted upon the best principles. — So much pains do men take to blind their own understandings, and so much do they provoke the Divine Providence to blind them still farther by a judicial infatuation, according as it is written, *God shall give them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they shall not see, and ears that they shall not hear, lest they should be converted, and be healed !*

When to this want of resolution is added the violence of the passions, grown powerful by indulgence, no wonder these combined forces shall
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not only reconcile men to their own evil actions, but make them even forget they were ever guilty of them, and altogether insensible of their own shame. — When *Nathan*, under the disguise of fable, represented to *David* his great crime, the innocent King, not dreaming that he himself was at all concerned in the story, but moved with indignation against the fictitious criminal, he pronounced, *as the Lord liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die.* But when the Prophet made him that awful reply, *David, thou art the man;* his conscious heart smote him at once, and he said unto *Nathan*, *I have sinned against the Lord.*

When the Prophet *Elisba* told *Hazael* what barbarities and enormous cruelties he should commit, when he came to be king of *Syria*, *Hazael*, shocked with the thought, answered with an honest warmth, *what! is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?* And yet *Hazael* was the man that did this great thing, and worse. He had, it seems, by good reasoning and a dextrous management of his heart, got over all his silly prejudices, and had fully reconciled himself to the character the Prophet had given him. — So great is the force of self-deceit, and so necessary is it to make an early acquaintance with the heart, and to be ever assiduous in
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the cultivation of it, that it may not forfeit its integrity. *Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.*

Let me conclude with a few words, more particularly addressed to the younger part of my audience.

The follies of youth are commonly said to be excuseable, because they proceed from youth. Youth is an excuse for folly. It is exposed, we say, not only to the general temptations of the world, but to others peculiar to itself, to its own age and condition. The prime and vigour of life, the spirits brisk and lively, the passions strong and importunate, the deceitfulness of sin and its high promises, the heart unpractised in the art of self-government, want of experience in the world, and, at the same time, the vain affectation of what is called, in a very bad sense, knowing the world; these all combine to draw you into the interests of the more engaging party, where the pleasures of sense invite with the whole force of their charms, and give a double relish in the enjoyment. — *Rejoyce then, O young man, in thy youth, and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and*

in the sight of thine eyes:—but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.—

The awful sentence in the latter part, you see, makes the former a severe irony. And the purport of the whole, is a most serious admonition; that all those pretences are but specious palliatives of guilt, empty delusions, which must end in destruction. For,

You cannot really think, any of these apologies you are making have any solidity in them. Is it possible you can conceive, God Almighty should have given you health, and spirits, and vigorous principles of action, without expecting any return to be made him for these inestimable blessings? Is the flower and pride of youth to be spent in the service of sin, the first-fruits of life to be sacrificed to Satan, and the refuse to be reserved for the great Author and Preserver of your being? Is the knowledge of God and your duty the last accomplishment to be acquired? *If thou hast gathered nothing of this in thy youth, saith the son of Sirach, how canst thou find any thing in thine age?*—Or, is the government of reason to take place, when its powers have been long dethroned by the tyranny of the passions? Is the art of self-government to be attained in a day, or by early practice and habitual exercise? Will sensual pleasures, and the gratifications of appetite

tite add strength, and firmness, and resolution to the mind, and not weaken and ruin its faculties? Will an early habit of vice facilitate the road to virtue, and not rather obstruct its entrance into the heart, if ever you should be desirous to introduce it there?—Is the deceitfulness of sin a commendation of it, or its flattering promises a sufficient grounds for trusting to it? Is inexperience of the world an inducement, to be first acquainted with the worst part of it? Will you be the better for this acquaintance, when you have gained it? Will it qualify you for the more important offices of life? Will it teach you industry, frugality, perseverance, bravery, publick virtue? If not, how do you answer the end of your being, the design of your education, or the expectations of your country? — But, you will reform at a proper season hereafter, and when, in your cooler days, the tide of the blood begins to subside, you will have time enough to repair the breaches, that may have been made upon your constitution or your character, and, if need be, to repent of them. — Repent of them you most certainly will, if you live. But what assurance have you, that you shall not be cut off in the blossom of your sins? *Who knoweth but this night thy soul shall be required of thee?* And on that tremendous day, when *the righteous shall scarcely*

scarcely be saved, how shall the ungodly and the impenitent sinner appear? If it be presumable, that all favourable allowances will be made by your candid governors and tender guardians here on earth, yet who shall answer for you at that hour, when the *secrets of all hearts* shall be disclosed before the just Judge of heaven and earth? You may plead your cause with plausibility before fallible men, disguise your guilt, and escape with impunity, but He *who searcheth the heart is not mocked*. — All such reasoning is folly. — Remember, wisdom, true wisdom, in the scripture-stile, is but another name for Religion. And *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge*; not the beginning only, but the principal part of it. Let this knowledge be first obtained, and impressed deeply on the heart. All other knowledge, in comparison of this, is of little or no value. This will recommend you both to God and man: but other knowledge, without this, will scarce procure you a favourable reception even amongst men. — Infinite is the force of habit: endeavour to gain a habit of goodness betimes, and the love of it will increase more and more, till the practice becomes natural. Be resolute in its pursuit, and suffer not your heart to deceive you into the least degree of dissimulation, by screening its errors or hiding its guilt

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even from yourself. Every step of connivance is dangerous, it leads the heart from a lesser insincerity to a greater, from one equivocation to another, till it becomes indifferent to truth, grows corrupt by degrees, and at last perhaps abandoned. Preserve the dignity of your nature, and maintain your honour, by giving up no point of conscience for a present conveniency, much less to purchase an unlawful pleasure. Persist in what you know to be right, at all adventures, whatever worldly advantages you may lose by it, or however unfashionable the appearance may be in the eyes of men. Study to shew yourself approved unto God, by a good heart. And be it your comfort, or otherwise it will be your terror, that *the Lord seeth not as man seeth, for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.* Therefore, *keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it are the issues of life.*

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